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Articles in Today's Clips

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* Important Story

BRIAN DICKERSON

Lemonade horror spurs no apology

BY BRIAN DICKERSON • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • JUNE 1, 2008

A couple of months have passed since a University of Michigan professor and his wife lost custody of their 7-year-old son after a Comerica Park security guard noticed the boy drinking a bottle of Mike's Hard Lemonade.

Young Leo Ratte is back with his parents, and in hindsight the agencies that conspired to turn the boy's idyllic afternoon at the ballpark into an Orwellian nightmare concede they may have made a mountain out of a molehill.

So if they had another chance, I asked Leo's tormentors last week, what would they do differently?

Not much, they all agreed.

"Our security staff was following protocol. Once they notice a minor in possession of alcohol, it becomes a law enforcement event," Tigers spokesman Rob Matwick told me Friday, reiterating the ball club's position that security officers were obligated to alert police after determining that Leo had drank about 12 ounces of alcoholic lemonade.

"I'm not going to say we learned any lessons," Detroit Police spokesman James Tate said a few minutes later, repeating his assertion that officers did the right thing by insisting that Leo be taken into protective custody until Child Protective Services could conduct a thorough investigation. "There was nothing that was deemed to be done inappropriately by our department."

Still waiting for a legal opinion

And what about Child Protective Services? I asked spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet after talking to Tate. Was the agency still maintaining that it had no

discretion to release Leo to his mother once an after-hours magistrate had authorized the boy's removal from the Ratte family home?

"We are still consulting our legal counsel, and when that discussion has been completed, we will be in a better position to respond," Sorbet replied courteously.

Chris Ratte, who teaches archeology at U-M, maintained from the moment security guards approached him in the ninth inning of the Tigers' April 5 loss to the Chicago White Sox that he didn't realize the lemonade he'd bought Leo was alcoholic.

Ratte, who rarely watches television, said he'd never heard of hard lemonade and noted that the sign above the concession stand where he purchased his son's drink referred only to "Mike's Lemonade." (The Tigers say all such signs have since been amended to make clear that Mike's contains alcohol.)

But it took six days and two Family Court hearings for the state to decide that Ratte was telling the truth, and that Leo would be safe under his father's roof.

Hoping for more

Don Duquette, a law professor who oversees U-M's Child Advocacy Law Clinic, says assertions that none of the agencies involved in Leo's removal had the discretion to return him to his parents are nonsense.

"I think that what happened to the child was clearly unconstitutional," said Duquette, who added that he's still hopeful the state will convene "a fairly high-level work group" to study what went wrong in the Rattes' case.

In a phone call from Turkey, where he's participating in the excavation of two ancient fortresses, Chris Ratte said he has been encouraged by the initial response to a complaint he filed with the Child Protective Services' ombudsman.

But what he'd really like, Ratte added, is for a couple of well-dressed people to show up at his Ann Arbor home and explain to Leo that taking him from his parents was a mistake.

And what about the Tigers? I asked Ratte.

"Haven't heard from them," he said.

Late Friday, I asked Matwick why the ball club hadn't at least invited Leo and his dad back to Comerica Park with a couple of complimentary tickets.

"I don't know," Matwick admitted. "It might be more of a risk-management thing."

Contact **BRIAN DICKERSON** at 248-351-3697 or *bdickerson@freepress.com*.

Jones couple charged with maintaining drug house

Posted by [Gazette Staff Reports](#) May 30, 2008 22:47PM

CASSOPOLIS -- A Jones couple was arraigned Friday on six drug and weapons charges in connection with their arrest a day earlier at their home.

Cass County Drug Enforcement Team members said they found remnants of a methamphetamine laboratory, meth, marijuana and weapons in the home of husband and wife Chad Allen Laughman, 31, and Debra Lynn Laughman, 32, according to a press release from the team.

Police said two children, ages 3 and 4, were removed from the home and taken into the custody of the Michigan Department of Human Services. The home is located in the 61000 block of South Main Street in Jones.

The Laughmans are charged with possessing/maintaining a laboratory involving meth, possession of meth, maintaining a drug house, possession of marijuana and two counts of having a firearm in possession during the commission of a felony.

They were in jail Friday, police said, and bond was set at \$40,000 each.

To provide information about this case or any felony crimes in Cass County, call the enforcement team at (269) 782-5206 or the anonymous tip line at (800) 462-9328.

Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

Two young children removed from home

Friday, May 30, 2008 6:09 PM EDT

CASSOPOLIS - On Thursday, May 29, at approximately 9 a.m., the Cass County Drug Enforcement Team, acting on a citizen's tip, arrested two Jones residents for methamphetamine, marijuana and firearm-related offenses.

Two children, ages 3 and 4, were removed from the home by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The Cass County Drug Enforcement Team responded to the 61000 block of S. Main Street within the village of Jones after receiving information of drug activity taking place.

Upon arrival, detectives located remnants of a methamphetamine lab, methamphetamine product, marijuana and weapons within the home.

A 32-year-old female and a 31-year-old male (husband and wife) were taken into custody and charged with numerous drug-related offenses, felony firearms and child abuse.

The couple were lodged at the Cass County Jail in Cassopolis.

Arraignment was set for Friday in Fourth District Court, Cassopolis, where their bond will be set.

Anyone with information about this or any other felony crimes may call the Cass County Drug Enforcement Team at (269) 782-5206 or the anonymous tip line at 1-800-462-9328.

June 2, 2008**LETTERS****Transracial Adoptions**

To the Editor:

“De-emphasis on Race in Adoption Is Criticized” (news article, May 27), about the confusion around transracial adoptions and whether they benefit or ultimately harm children, didn’t mention an alternative: open adoption.

We adopted my son in New York City in 2001. His birth mother is Indonesian-Chinese. His birth father is Punjab Indian. We have an open adoption, and while we’ve never met my son’s birth father, his birth mother is becoming an increasingly important resource to him (and us) as we learn about his ancestry.

Now she has married a man who is also Punjabi and very willing to teach my son about this part of his heritage.

As Caucasians, my husband and I will never fully understand what it’s like to be a member of a racial minority, or Indian or Chinese or Indonesian. But, through open adoption, at least we have a chance.

We hope to raise a child with a unique understanding of (and tolerance for) the complexities of ethnic, religious and national identity. Suzanne Moyers

Montclair, N.J., May 27, 2008

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To the Editor:

As a white adoptive parent of a biracial daughter, I am angered by the conclusions of a recent report issued by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute advocating revision of the Multiethnic Placement Act to allow agencies to take race and culture into consideration in adoptive placement.

I agree that prospective foster and adoptive parents should be educated about how to support a child’s pride in and understanding of his or her ethnicity. But any movement toward “black belongs with black” and “white belongs with white” is a return to a “separate but equal” approach to race in America. It affirms race as the primary basis of identity and re-establishes the color line in American society.

This is a step backward for all of us.

Donna Coffey

Waleska, Ga., May 28, 2008

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Nathaniel Abraham's drug arrest surprises, disappoints

Police say young murder convict found with Ecstasy

BY JOHN WISELY AND KORIE WILKINS • FREE PRESS STAFF
WRITERS • MAY 31, 2008

"Shocked and devastated," is how John Cromer, a mentor for Nathaniel Abraham, said he felt Friday upon learning of the 22-year-old's arrest in Pontiac on drug charges.

Abraham, who in 1999 became one of the youngest people in Michigan ever to be convicted of murder, had promised to turn his life around after his release from a juvenile correctional facility in January 2007.

"There were so many people in his corner trying to show him positive lifestyle examples," said Wayne County Circuit Judge Craig Strong, who had supported Abraham and went clothes shopping with him last year after Abraham emerged from incarceration in a white suit with pink pinstripes and matching hat and shoes. "If it's true, it would be such a disappointment to so many who stood behind him."

But Strong also acknowledged that there were detractors expecting failure.

"There are a lot of people out there who wanted something like this to happen," he said.

And so went the sentiment of many of Abraham's supporters Friday.

A year and four months after his release, at a gas station less than 2 miles from the parking lot where he murdered 18-year-old Ronnie Greene Jr. 11 years ago, and across the street from Perry Mount Park Cemetery where

Greene is buried, Abraham was arrested.

He was picked up around 1 a.m. Friday at a Sunoco when police say they found him with more than 250 pills of the club drug Ecstasy, worth about \$1,500, from his 1973 red Cadillac convertible. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted. He also was charged with driving with a suspended license.

In court Friday, "I'll be hiring a lawyer," was all Abraham said -- other than his name -- during his brief video arraignment in front of Pontiac District Judge Cynthia Walker, who set his bond at \$10,000.

Later Friday, attorney Daniel Bagdade, who represented Abraham in the murder case, visited with his former client at the jail.

"He's never been in an adult jail before," Bagdade said. "It's not that pleasant."

Abraham posted bail and was released on a tether Friday afternoon.

News of Abraham's arrest brought scorn and sadness from people who followed his case. It also brought more insult to his victim's family.

"It's like a slap in the face," said Greene's sister, Nichole Edwards, 34, of Auburn Hills. "It's hard to put into words. We hoped and prayed he'd stay out of trouble. We came to closure about this. Now, it feels like we're back at square one."

The family plans to repeat its somber tradition June 14 when members gather to lay flowers on Greene's grave to mark his birthday, Edwards said.

"He got a second chance, and this is what he did with it," Chris Greene said. "With the second chance he got from killing my brother, he didn't take advantage of it. God saw it."

Others felt the sting, too.

"I am very disappointed and particularly sad for the hundreds of people who worked hard to rehabilitate him for the nine years he was in the state training school, and the wonderful mentors and the volunteers and churches that stood by him," Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore, the judge who sentenced Abraham after his murder trial, said Friday in a prepared statement.

Despite being just 11 years old at the time of the 1997 shooting, Abraham was charged with murder as an adult under newer get-tough prosecution policies. But after an Oakland County jury convicted him of second-degree murder in 1999, Moore made the controversial decision to sentence Abraham as a juvenile, ensuring his release from juvenile detention on his 21st birthday.

"I'd like to thank you for taking that chance and believing in me," Abraham told Moore in January 2007, when the judge released him.

Oakland County Prosecutors, who had opposed the juvenile sentence, said they worried that Abraham had not yet been rehabilitated. In court Friday, assistant prosecutor Beth Hand asked for a \$250,000 bond, saying Abraham still was getting into trouble.

"There is no reason for him to be out on the street," Hand said. "He's not working. He's not going to school."

Abraham said he used marijuana twice a week, took Ecstasy three tablets at a time and drank shots of alcohol a few times a month, said Glenda Coudret, a pretrial investigator who interviewed him Friday.

"He feels he may be in need of substance abuse treatment now," Coudret said in court.

Pontiac police said plainclothes officers in an unmarked car were conducting surveillance on North Perry Street early Friday when they saw Abraham outside his car at the gas station. A man on a bicycle drove up and police witnessed what appeared to be drug sale, Sgt. Kevin Braddock said.

The car was parked with a flattened front tire on the driver's side. As the officers approached from the front, Abraham was standing behind the car with the trunk open.

"He didn't see the guys coming up behind him, and he threw away a bag," Braddock said.

Inside a Crown Royal whiskey bag, officers found the Ecstasy, Braddock said.

Abraham was arrested without incident, and the vehicle was impounded.

Judge Walker scheduled a conference on his case for June 10. Hand said if he were convicted, Abraham likely would face 2-5 years in prison.

Rochelle Riley: Where are Abraham's backers?

BY ROCHELLE RILEY • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • MAY 31, 2008

Nathaniel Abraham was arrested Friday for possessing 254 tabs of Ecstasy with intent to distribute them.

I got right on the phone and called Al Sharpton and Martin Luther King III. After all, it was they who stood on the steps of the Oakland County Courthouse in Pontiac eight years ago to protest Nathaniel's adult conviction for stealing a neighbor's .22-caliber rifle when he was 11 and fatally shooting 18-year-old Ronnie Greene Jr.

They stood a year after Amnesty International featured Nathaniel in its 1998 report condemning America's juvenile justice system.

But neither Sharpton nor King came back to rally the kid with no cameras around. Neither visited the W.J. Maxey Training School to teach Nathaniel responsibility.

I must have missed those rallies where the ministers prayed with Nathaniel and brought him a copy of "Native Son" or the news conference where they announced the college account for the boy.

But that's always been the problem with Nathaniel Abraham.

He was never a boy.

Always a man

When Nathaniel stole a gun and fired it, he meant it. And he became a man.

When he was released 16 months ago, he strutted out like a man. His attitude and attire -- a white, striped pimp suit, fedora and pink shirt -- shouted his intent.

Maya Angelou said that "when people show you who they are, believe them, the first time." We knew last year that Nathaniel wasn't ready. He told us. He was trying to get the attention that shooting an innocent kid didn't. He was released right back into the community he had scarred.

Now, if he did this, he's trying to get the attention that the white suit didn't. And the fame Nathaniel seeks after signing a recording contract last year still isn't the fame he has.

Nathaniel has become the car wreck you can't look away from. And we do just watch. Where were all the mentors who were supposed to help him acclimate to the life most boys know away from jail?

He didn't stand a chance

Truth is, Nathaniel Abraham never had a chance.

His mother, whom his attorney Daniel Bagdade described as distraught, has been "pretty much isolated from Nathaniel's life," he said.

His mentor, John Cromer, was arrested for drinking in a bar with Nathaniel.

Though he was embraced by the powerful Hartford Memorial Baptist church, its congregation and pastors are three cities away from Nathaniel's daily life in Oakland County.

And then there's Bagdade, a busy Southfield attorney who talked to Nathaniel weekly, but didn't know he was driving a Cadillac until after his arrest.

"He has gotten a recording contract, believe it or not, and in recent weeks, he's been spending almost all of his time working on his music," Bagdade said. "He's been doing very well. ... This is a total shock. He was doing fine."

But Nathaniel Abraham has never been fine.

He has needed a kind of help a loving mother couldn't give and Michigan cannot afford. And drive-by support from strangers doesn't help.

Nathaniel Abraham is in trouble again. Where are the crowds?

It's been a couple of hours, and I'm still waiting to hear from King and Sharpton.

Contact **ROCHELLE RILEY** at *rriley99@freepress.com*.



Saturday, May 31, 2008

Abraham arrested on drug charge

A year after release, convicted killer, 22, is accused of selling Ecstasy.

Delores Flynn and George Hunter / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- Convicted murderer Nathaniel Abraham had a strong support system when he walked out of a juvenile detention facility last year, including an apartment, access to full college tuition, and a network of social workers who were eager to help him find a job and reintegrate into society.

But all that wasn't enough to keep him out of trouble with the law.

Abraham -- a killer at age 11 who has been closely watched as a national symbol of the challenges facing the juvenile justice system -- was arrested after an alleged drug deal early Friday morning in the parking lot of a gas station in Pontiac. Police say he had 254 Ecstasy pills in his possession.

Abraham, 22, was charged via video arraignment Friday afternoon in 50th District Court with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, a 20-year felony. He was freed after posting 10 percent of his \$10,000 bond late Friday and was fitted for a tether that allows him to leave his house only to go to court, police officials said.

The network of people who put their faith in Abraham's ability to turn his life around was keenly disappointed when they got the news about his latest run-in with the law.

"I'm very sad today," Abraham's former guardian, Elaine Rosati, said. "We worked very hard to get him ready to live in the world, and now this happens. It's very disappointing."

Conviction drew spotlight

Abraham made headlines when he became the youngest person in Michigan to be charged as an adult for the 1997 shooting of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene of Pontiac. He was charged with first-degree murder under a get-tough Michigan law that allows prosecutors to charge juveniles of any age with serious felonies. The law gives judges the option to sentence juveniles to adult prison time or keep them in juvenile detention until age 21.

After a jury convicted Abraham of second-degree murder at age 13, Judge Eugene Moore sentenced him to juvenile detention with a mandated release at age 21. Prosecutors argued he should be sent to an adult correctional facility.

Nicole Edwards, Greene's sister, expressed disappointment in Abraham's drug arrest. "I thought he would rehabilitate himself," she said. "This is like a slap in the face."

Making opportunities available to offenders and having a support system is not enough to rehabilitate someone, criminal justice experts say. In order to truly be rehabilitated, offenders must change their core belief systems -- and prosecutors and others say they never thought Abraham owned up to his crime and changed his way of thinking.

"You need to give them more than just support -- you have to help them change their fundamental beliefs," said Barb Hankey, manager of Oakland County Community Corrections, which offers programs to help offenders change their way of thinking.

"Certainly, people who do have support are in a better position to succeed than those who don't, but you need more than that. If they grow up thinking a certain lifestyle is OK, and that's all they know, just telling them to change isn't going to help them."

During his incarceration, Abraham earned his GED and began college classes, but he continued to struggle with anger management issues. He also refused to accept responsibility for the murder, officials at the W.J. Maxey Training School said.

Rehabilitation questioned

When he was released last year upon turning 21, criminal justice officials were concerned he was not ready to enter society. His arrest Friday proves those concerns were valid, Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley said.

"My argument for years was that he was not rehabilitated," Carley said. "Nate had a lot of issues, and one of the things we saw -- probably the most prevalent issue -- was anger management. He would get into fights. My concern was, what's going to happen when he leaves this very restrictive environment for the real world? My other concern was that he was a diagnosed alcoholic and drug user all the way back to when he was 8 years old.

"Today pretrial services in court said Nate admitted marijuana, Ecstasy and alcohol use. So obviously the things that brought him to court when he was 11 haven't left. They are still a part of his life."

Hankey said she saw a red flag when Abraham walked out of jail wearing a fur coat, ivory fedora and ivory-and-hot-pink pinstriped suit with matching pink tie and shoes.

"That was an indication that maybe he hadn't changed his way of thinking, and that he still thought the criminal lifestyle was glamorous," she said. "That's not to say everyone who dresses extravagantly is a criminal, but when you take all the factors of the case together, it showed that maybe this person has not changed his core way of thinking."

Juvenile system to blame?

After Abraham was released in January 2007, Carley and Abraham's attorney, Daniel Bagdade, told The Detroit News that the state of Michigan offered Abraham an unheard-of deal that included free rent and college tuition for up to two years after his release.

News of the offer -- which state officials first denied, then admitted -- enraged the public and led to calls for an investigation. In the end, Abraham was reimbursed about \$1,200 for a security deposit and rent at an apartment and some furniture and food.

Abraham, who expressed interest in a rap career, was given a recording deal by Detroit-based label Hits Entertainment Group.

"His behavior and arrest is so disappointing," Carley said. "Over \$1 million was spent on this one person so that this wouldn't happen. Should he be a reflection of the juvenile system? I really don't believe the whole

juvenile system should fail because he did.

"Do I think the sentence was wrong originally? Yes. I never thought the juvenile system would address his problems adequately. But they provided everything they had and then some. But it's the whole saying taking a horse to water. You can't force somebody to be rehabilitated."

About six plainclothes Pontiac officers and Michigan State Police troopers were operating a juvenile curfew detail at 1 a.m. Friday when they noticed a possible drug sale between a male subject on a bike and a man at a vehicle, who was later identified as Abraham, at the station in the 1100 block of North Perry, said Sgt. Kevin Braddock.

A couple of officers approached Abraham, who was standing behind the open trunk of a red 1970s Cadillac convertible, while other officers approached from behind, police said. When officers asked to see Abraham's hands, he claimed to be changing a flat tire and was seen throwing a purple Crown Royal liquor bag back into the trunk of the car, police said. It was later investigated and contained what were suspected to be individually wrapped Ecstasy pills. The car was impounded with a flat tire.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080531/METRO/805310375>

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Saturday, May 31, 2008

Laura Berman

Ignoring a second chance



Natalie Green has watched Nathaniel Abraham grow up as so many of us have. In the newspapers. On the evening news.

For the last month or two, she's known him another way -- as the pleasant young man who drives a red Cadillac and "stays next door."

She knew who he was. Knew all about his history as a social experiment, a state-sponsored effort to turn around an 11-year-old killer, to actually rehabilitate him.

Like most of the neighbors I spoke to on this tidy, quiet street, she wants to see him succeed. To her, he's "always polite and nice," a young man who cuts the grass and smiles. And it's difficult to imagine him in Oakland County Jail, or as a self-confessed (authorities say) drug user, or as the sort of person who would be carrying 254 Ecstasy pills.

A state of disbelief

Daniel Bagdade is shocked, too. "Stunned."

"I absolutely never expected this," said Abraham's longtime lawyer, who first represented the now 22-year-old when he was 11, wide-eyed and scared, charged with and then convicted of killing 18-year-old Ronnie Greene.

After all these years, after visiting Abraham at the Maxey Training Center where he grew up, where he served an unprecedented sentence for second-degree murder until he was 21, Bagdade is still in "constant touch" with him.

But on Friday, he sounded genuinely wounded.

Bagdade had visited Abraham in jail, where he was being "harassed" by the other prisoners, who shared the same holding tank cell with him. He considers him a friend, one of the few that Abraham has, and the only remnant of his Maxey life who has stayed in touch with Abraham since his probation ended in January.

Whatever his misgivings, he had supported Abraham's dreams of becoming a rapper, of turning his unusual childhood and public notoriety into a career of words and music and public acclaim.

Working to get ahead

The young man who disdained his infamy now seeks a different kind of prominence.

His new next-door neighbor, Natalie Green, contends with life more than dreams.

She works as an aide at an assisted living center from 6 a.m. until 2 p.m. At 5 p.m., she heads to her new job as a manager at a fast food store.

Her work isn't glamorous, and won't make her a superstar. At 34, she gets almost no sleep since she took the second job to offset the rising cost of feeding her Jeep's gas tank and her "2-year-old grandbaby."

Abraham carries the pressure of knowing that for everyone on the street who wants him to succeed, others in the world are waiting and watching for him to fail.

But doesn't Green wonder why he isn't working the way she is?

"A lot of these young guys don't want to get a real job," she sighs. "They don't understand they have to work to stay out of trouble."

You can reach Laura Berman at (248) 647-7221 or lberman@detnews.com.

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Nate faces drug charges

Convicted killer now suspected of dealing Ecstasy

By SHAUN BYRON
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - Daily use of Ecstasy, smoking marijuana every other day and abusing alcohol. These are the admissions the Oakland County Prosecutor's office say Nathaniel Abraham made after he was arrested early Friday morning, accused of having \$5,000 worth of Ecstasy pills in a velvet, purple Crown Royal bag.

Abraham - regarded by some as a shining example of successful rehabilitation - was released as a free man in January 2007 after spending all of his teenage years in a juvenile facility as a result of a 1997 second-degree murder conviction in the shooting death of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene Jr.

At his final appearance before Oakland County Chief Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore, Abraham made a promise not to squander his second chance.

"I'm going to make the best of it," he told the judge. "I am going to take it one day at a time."

On Friday, Abraham fiddled with his collar and said very little while appearing via television during his arraignment on drug-related charges at 50th District Court.

He is charged with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance and a separate charge of driving on a suspended license.

Judge Cynthia Thomas Walker gave Abraham a \$10,000 bond, although prosecutors asked for \$250,000. His bond was posted late Friday afternoon, and Abraham was due to be released on a tether.

"I'll be hiring my own attorney, ma'am," Abraham told Walker when she asked if he would need a court-appointed lawyer.

Now 22, Abraham made headlines when, at the age of 11, he became the youngest person charged with murder to be prosecuted under a 1997 Michigan law that allowed adult prosecutions of children of any age in a serious felony case.

His release last year came after spending nearly a decade in a juvenile facility.

If convicted of the latest charge, Abraham could now face up to 20 years in prison.

Abraham's longtime attorney and advocate, Daniel Bagdade, spoke to the 22-yearold inside the Oakland County Jail - where Abraham had a mattress and a small corner of a large cell he shared with more than a dozen men.

"He is freaked out," Bagdade said. "Almost everybody in the area where they have him in the OCJ knew who he was. They were giving him all kinds of crap."

Bagdade said Abraham appreciates the gravity of the situation.

"He is upset; he is concerned. He is scared," Bagdade said. "He is worried about what could happen to him.

"He has spent a lot of time, 10 years, in locked settings. He has been behind bars, and he knows what it is like to be in a cell. But he has never been in an adult prison setting."

Pontiac police officials said Abraham's arrest Friday was merely good police work, as they were attempting to boost patrols and enforce a juvenile curfew when Abraham was arrested shortly after 1 a.m. at a Sunoco gas station in the 1100 block of Perry Street.

Two armed robberies happened in neighborhoods just south of the gas station, although police say they are unrelated to Abraham.

Officer Jason Teelander spotted a man on a bicycle ride up to a 1970 red convertible Cadillac and make a hand-tohand exchange with the person who had been seen driving the car, believed to be Abraham.

Uniformed police and troopers arrived at the scene to assist with the investigation for what was suspected to have been a drug deal.

The person on the bicycle was stopped while officers and troopers approached the front of the Cadillac.

Abraham, meanwhile, who was standing behind the car, opened up the trunk and threw the velvet bag inside, police say. While one group of officers spoke with Abraham, another group walked up behind him.

That's when they say they found three separate bags within the Crown Royal bag, containing a total of 254 pills.

A field test determined the pills were Ecstasy, although a crime lab test will confirm those results, authorities say.

Police said Abraham initially told officers he was changing a flat tire, but he said nothing once they found the suspected narcotics.

The man on the bicycle was also arrested on a probation violation.

Police Sgt. Kevin Braddock said Abraham gave officers an address in Southfield at the time of his arrest, although he still has ties with people in the city.

Ecstasy is a drug of choice for people younger than 30, said Oakland County

Sheriff 's Lt. Joe Quisenberry, who is commander of the drug unit that performs raids within the city. The number of pills believed to belong to Abraham is far more than what one would consider being for personal use only, Quisenberry said, adding that anyone with that amount is most likely a mid-level dealer.

"It can't be characterized as only a suburban white drug or a college drug," he said. "It might have been 10 years ago, but it's crossed over into the mainstream into every area of the county."

Following his initial release from custody, Abraham was said to be starting job training for a maintenance position at a manufacturing facility in Bay City.

An official with the halfway house where Abraham was staying remarked at the time he had a solid work ethic.

Then last September, Abraham was said to be enrolling as a full-time student at Wayne State University.

There was also talk of a book deal and a blossoming career as a rap artist.

Bagdade said Abraham had already signed a contract to write and perform rap music, and he was on the verge of setting up a multi-city performance tour.

"Nathaniel has been doing very well," Bagdade said. "That's why I'm so surprised and blindsided with this arrest. Things were going very well for him on the outside."

Asked what could have led to this, Bagdade said he simply did not know. He did not know if he would be retained to represent Abraham in this case.

Last July, Abraham signed autographs for children after speaking to crowded audience at the Holland Community Center in Pontiac.

During his speech, he told children to listen to their parents and teachers so they can avoid repeating the mistake he had made.

However, Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Beth Hand said he has failed to hold down a job or have a permanent place of residence since his release.

Hand said Abraham has actually been living with his girlfriend in Pontiac, despite giving a Southfield address.

She said it was Abraham's girlfriend who indicated he has been unemployed and working on a career as a rap artist on his own music label.

Abraham's mother, Gloria Abraham-Holland, declined to comment.

"His mom is distraught," Bagdade said. "She worries about Nathaniel."

In a written statement, Moore said: "I'm very disappointed and particularly sad for the hundreds of people who worked hard to rehabilitate him for the nine years he was in the state training school and the wonderful mentors and

volunteers and charges that stood by him."

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Deborah Carley said she wasn't convinced that Abraham was rehabilitated when he was released.

Carley, who was part of the original prosecution team in 1997, said Abraham should have been given a blended sentence, meaning he would have been placed in the juvenile system with the option of prison at age 21.

"He has no known address that we know of, he has never had a job, he hasn't gone to school and there is an obvious question of how he is getting his money and how is he surviving," Carley said. "All the things he was going to do, he never did anything.

"I can't criticize the services that were given to him. We gave him everything we have and then some. He was a 21-year-old boy after 10 years and released out on his own. It's too much for anybody and certainly it didn't work for him."

Bagdade fears that prosecutors will be aiming for Abraham.

"I think the prosecutors are probably going to do anything and everything they can to try to nail Nathaniel," Bagdade said, declining to discuss the case until facts are presented.

"Let's wait and see what happens," Bagdade said. "We still don't know what the facts are with this case."

Online editor Stephen Frye and staff writer Ann Zaniewski contributed to this story.

Contact staff writer Shaun Byron at (248) 745-4685 or shaun.byron@oakpress.com.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/053108/loc_20080531298.shtml

The County Press

Teen leads police on chase

Speeds reach 100 mph in 40-mile pursuit

By SUSAN YOUNGER
Staff Reporter

LAPEER -- An ignored Michigan State Police traffic stop early Sunday morning resulted in a 40-mile chase and the arrest of a local teen for car theft and fleeing police.

The incident also proved costly for a young Lapeer woman, whose car was drained of gasoline and was left with a \$250 towing bill.

"I intend to get that back," said Jessi Karrer, 21, of Lapeer. "If not from him, than from his parents."

Problems were discovered about 2:48 a.m. as MSP Lapeer Post troopers Scott Reynolds and Jason Mercier, while on routine patrol in the city of Lapeer, spotted a suspected inebriated motorist driving a black 1999 black Oldsmobile Intrigue in a reckless manner near the Charbridge Apartment complex.

"At the time, they didn't realize the car was stolen," said Sgt. Joe VanderMeulen, of the Lapeer Post. "They activated their emergency lights because he was driving in a careless manner."

The vehicle didn't stop and accelerated in an attempt to elude Reynolds and Mercier. The car continued west on Oregon Road reaching speeds of 100 miles an hour, ignoring traffic signs and lights. The up to 40 mile pursuit lasted about 29 minutes and concluded on a dead-end on Vassar Road when the car collided into a culvert.

The driver, 16, of Lapeer, fled on foot into a wooded area. He was located by police officers several minutes later and arrested. His male passengers, ages, 24 and 17, of Lapeer, were also taken into custody at the scene. Mercier and Reynolds were assisted by Lapeer County Sheriff's Department deputies, Genesee County Sheriff's Department deputies, and police from MSP Flint Post, Richfield Township, Davison Township and Lapeer.

Meanwhile Karrer, asleep in her family's home, was woken by police about 4 a.m.

"They asked me where my car was and I looked outside and it was gone," Karrer said. "They told me it was involved in a high speed chase. Trooper Reynolds called me back about 5:30 a.m., and asked me if I knew the kid who took it. I didn't and I'm glad they arrested him."

Karrer, who left the keys in her car, won't be repeating that mistake soon. The joyride depleted her car of gasoline and with minimal insurance, she had to pay the \$250 towing bill.

"It's a beater. My dog ate all the door panels. It's really just a shell of a car inside," she said. "I'm really surprised that anyone would bother taking it."

The crash remains under investigation, and it's uncertain if the passengers, who both told police they were unaware the car was stolen, will be charged.

"The juvenile driver, 16, has been arraigned on charges of fleeing and eluding in probate court," said F/Lt Patrick McGreevy. "He's been remanded to a juvenile facility in Midland."

Susan Younger may be reached at (810) 664-0811, Ext. 8122 or susan.younger@lapeergroup.com.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.countypress.com/stories/053008/loc_20080530097.shtml

Bay County's free health clinic is long on patients, but short on volunteers from the medical community

Sunday, June 01, 2008

By MIKE BLASKY

mblasky@bc-times.com | 894-9644

As Brian Whalen's exam finishes at the Helen M. Nickless Volunteer Clinic on Wednesday, he contemplates the money he's saved.

"What's an MRI cost nowadays, doc?" Whalen asks Jack Kircher, the physician assistant treating him.

"About a grand," Kircher said.

Whalen, of Bay City, shakes his head.

"I could never afford it," he said. "I mean, I can sit here for three, four or five hours on a Wednesday night and it's worth it. Paying a grand is unthinkable."

Also unthinkable: Not having enough volunteers like Kircher to provide free health care.

Yet that's the position the Hampton Township clinic, 1458 W. Center Road, is facing, says Joyce Hardy, manager of the Nickless Clinic and president of Free Clinics of Michigan. The clinic, open every Wednesday from 4 p.m. until the last patient is treated, serves the uninsured and underinsured in Bay County.

"A year ago, we saw 40 patients a night and could get by with four practitioners every (Wednesday)," she said. "Now with 50 to 60 people a night, we need six practitioners. There's an enormous shortage."

Hardy was forced to close the clinic on May 14 because she lacked enough volunteers, and she's forced to do it again on July 2.

"I try to have the (volunteer) schedule filled at least one month in advance," she said. "There's no way I can run with a shortage. There's no appointments. We don't know how many patients there will be on a given night.

"I'd rather not be open at all than turn people away."

Hardy said the clinic's staff has been overworked since January, when the Bay Health Plan - which provides insurance for 1,700 low-income residents in Bay County - stopped accepting new enrollments because of dwindling funds. Patients had no other options other than the Nickless Clinic.

Dr. Floyd "Bud" Stevens, medical director for the clinic, said volunteers just can't keep up the pace.

"The horses get tired," Stevens said.

But for patients like Whalen, the clinic is a last resort.

Whalen, like many other clinic patients, works full-time but doesn't receive health care benefits.

So when he started having terrible headaches and needed an MRI, the clinic was the only option that made economic sense.

"This place saves me," he said.

According to information from the Bay Health Plan, 11,313 residents in Bay County do not have health insurance.

A long-term solution could end up in voters' hands come November.

Bay County commissioners are considering placing a millage request on the ballot that would help fund the Bay Health Plan. If passed, it would generate \$2 million and cover 90 percent of the county's uninsured who earn up to \$20,800 a year. The proposal would place a 0.67-mill tax on all property in Bay County for eight years. It would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$33.50 a year.

Hardy said when the Bay Health Plan was accepting enrollments, 70 percent of the Bay County residents who visited the clinic qualified. That meant

volunteers would treat a patient one or two times before finding them a permanent practice.

"It was better for (the patients) and it kept (the clinic's) numbers down," she said.

For now, Hardy has been soliciting volunteers from the medical profession - doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

Kircher, who works more than 40 hours a week at Redi Med, 4175 N. Euclid Ave., said he volunteers every chance he gets.

"I'm kind of rich, in that I have a skill to give away that people want," said Kircher, an Essexville resident. "Most of these people are working with no health insurance, some of which have gone years without medical care."

But it's not easy to convince other professionals to be as giving, he said.

"I've made staff visits to other counties, made presentations to other staffs. What else can you do?" he asked.

Paulette Sramkoski, a nurse practitioner and Bay City resident, said some medical professionals choose to travel the world on "medical missions," but forget the problems in their own backyard.

"They don't realize there are people two streets over who are underserved medically," she said.

Like Kircher, Sramkoski said she's had trouble convincing co-workers to donate their time.

"Everybody's really busy," she said. "You can't sell this with, 'Want to do a good deed tonight?' There's no promotion, there's no gold star. This is just what being a community is."

Stevens said along with reducing the number of Wednesdays the clinic is open, the staff may be forced to restrict who is treated. While the clinic was envisioned to treat Bay County residents, patients from other counties show up for treatment.

"We've had as many as 24 percent a night from the Thumb," he said.
"(Restricting services) has to be an option. We don't want to do it, we want to serve, but we have to get more (medical practitioners) to volunteer."

Whalen, the patient, said he hopes the clinic gets more volunteers, but he understands the challenge.

"They work 40 hours a week too, or more. I can't imagine volunteering if I was in their shoes," he said.

He expects he'll be using the clinic's services for as long as he's able.

"I finally found a doctor I like."

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WSU, DMC dispute goes to Lansing

Sen. Tom George, R-Kalamazoo, chairman of the **Michigan Senate Health Policy Committee**, will hold a hearing Wednesday on the ongoing dispute between the **Wayne State University School of Medicine** and **Detroit Medical Center**.

Over the last four months, the two medical institutions have been embroiled in a controversy over a \$12 million medical contract. While the boards have been meeting weekly to resolve the matter, no solution appears in sight.

"This relationship between WSU and DMC has a direct effect on the health care for tens of thousands of people (in the Detroit area)," George said. "Both receive state funding for Medicaid, so we have an interest in making sure the system is working as best it can."

"I have been reading a lot about it. It's time we took a look at it. There may be something we can do (legislatively) to resolve it."

On Feb. 1, DMC decided to reduce Medicaid and indigent care payments to the university by \$1 million per month. Wayne State officials also contend DMC owes it another \$6 million for other unpaid services going back to 2007 that includes \$2 million for the group's obstetrics and gynecology program.

The Senate hearing is scheduled for 3 p.m. in the Boji Tower, 124 W. Allegan St. in Lansing.

— Jay Greene

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Advertisement





June 1, 2008

Medicaid rule changes would disrupt lives

People with developmental disabilities face many hurdles in their daily lives. Our society has made huge strides over the past half-century in helping such people to realize their full potential.

Because of vital programs and services provided through places like Summit Pointe, many people who probably would have spent their lives in institutions several generations ago today can lead active, productive lives in their communities.

But if proposed federal changes in Medicaid benefits take effect next month, hundreds of Calhoun County residents with developmental disabilities will find the rug pulled out from under them. Many will no longer get the supportive services they need to live independently and to hold down jobs. Recreational programs and social opportunities will be curtailed for them.

The rule changes are likely to create additional burdens for families, law enforcement, emergency rooms, charitable organizations and other groups whose resources already are strained.

Theoretically, the changes are aimed at eliminating waste and inefficiency in the Medicaid system. In reality, the rules as currently written will shatter lives. Rather than providing effective reforms, they simply will shift responsibility from the federal government to state and local entities which are unable to handle them.

As we said last month after the U.S. House of Representatives approved a year-long moratorium in implementing reforms, officials need to take time to craft and implement rule changes that will not devastate lives. All 50 governors have united to state unequivocally that if the changes are implemented as scheduled, it will have a devastating impact on communities throughout the country.

This is not a partisan issue, but rather a matter of common sense and compassion. Services on which are most vulnerable citizens depend cannot simply be eliminated without having severe repercussions throughout society.

The Bush administration has vowed to veto any action by Congress to delay implementation of the rule changes. It needs to rethink its position, or Congress needs to find the courage to stand up for the people it represents and override any veto.

Article published Sunday, June 1, 2008

TIGHT TIMES TOUGH CHOICES SERIES

Demand for food stamps surges across region

Sagging economy forces many to seek assistance

By KATE GIAMMARISE
TOLEDO BLADE STAFF WRITER

Last month, Roy and Monica Craven did something they thought they would never have to do.

They walked into the Lucas County Department of Job and Family Services on Monroe Street to see what kind of programs they could qualify for - food stamps, cash assistance, medical help, anything.

"We weren't familiar with the system," Mrs. Craven said. "We've always toughed it out before."

Her husband added, "I didn't want to do it. We were out of options."

Mr. Craven, 48, a former truck driver, has been unable to work since having a heart attack in February. Things have been tough for the Cravens since then. Mr. Craven has no memory of the several months preceding his heart attack, nor the attack itself, which happened in the kitchen of their Springfield Township home.

Unable to drive, he has undergone occupational and speech therapy and is supposed to start physical therapy soon. They have applied for Social Security disability payments because Mr. Craven can no longer work, though they anticipate they will have to wait a minimum of several months before receiving any money.

In the meantime, with no income, they were forced to seek assistance such as food stamps. It wasn't an easy choice. The only reason he allowed himself to ask for help, Mr. Craven said, is that as a former Jeep worker who also worked as a truck driver, worked for UPS, and had his own tree service business, "I paid into it all these years."

But as food stamp recipients, the Cravens are part of a growing group.



Monica and Roy Craven of Springfield Township lost their income after he suffered a heart attack.

(THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

The number of food-stamp recipients in Ohio has almost doubled in recent years - from 625,000 in 2001 to nearly 1.1 million people now.

That means almost 1 in 10 people in the state is receiving food stamps, said Brian Harter of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. That's not including an estimated 500,000 people who are eligible for the program but aren't signed up, he said.

Similarly, in Lucas County, the number of food stamp recipients has dramatically increased in the past several years. There are now 70,142 people receiving food stamps - about 16 percent of the 445,281 people in the county - compared to 50,925 recipients in 2002.

Like Ohio, Michigan also has experienced a big jump in food stamp use. More than 1.25 million Michigan residents receive food assistance, a number that has more than doubled since 2000, when only 580,308 did, according to data from the Michigan Department of Human Services. The number of people in the program has reached a record level, said Maureen Sorbet, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Monroe County has seen the number of food stamp cases (each case represents an average of three people) it handles more than double from a monthly average of 2,153 to 5,896 now.

What is happening in Ohio and Michigan matches national trends. A recent projection from the Congressional Budget Office estimates the number of food-stamp recipients will reach 28 million in 2009, which would tie a record for the program set in 1994.

Along with the increase in food-stamp use, some social service agencies say they have seen an increase in need.

At Toledo Seagate Food Bank, requests for food have increased about 27 percent from 2004 to last year. In March, Toledo Seagate, the United Way, Toledo Area Ministries, and the Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank unveiled a new campaign to meet the increasing need at local food banks and food pantries.

Why the big increase?

Statewide, the highest number of people ever enrolled in the program was in 1994, when 1.2 million Ohioans were receiving food stamps, the most since the program began in the 1960s. The number of recipients declined with welfare reform in 1996, Mr. Harter said, but has been steadily increasing since 1999.

Mr. Harter attributes growing enrollment to the state's poor job climate, plus efforts to reach out to people who are eligible for the benefits.

"Those are the primary things," he said. "The largest factor would be the economy and the unemployment rate. I think [the economy] is that bad." Last week, Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland established an anti-poverty task force, aimed at reducing the number of Ohioans - now more than 3.4 million people - living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Ohio's unemployment rate was 5.6 percent in April; it was 7.1 percent in Toledo. It was 5.8 percent statewide in March, and 7.9 percent in Toledo, according to the Department of Job and Family Services.

The rate varied in April across northwest Ohio from a low of 4.3 percent in Hancock County to a high of 8.4 percent in Huron County.

"I think it has a lot to do with the economy," said Elizabeth Hinkle, 20, who applied for the food stamp program for herself and her infant daughter in May. "They expect people to survive, but how can you if there's no income coming into the house?"

Staggering from auto industry cutbacks and job losses, Michigan is in a similar situation.

"[It's] the lack of jobs, the lack of good-paying jobs, the cost of everything going up," said Terry Buerer, director of the Monroe County Department of Human Services.

Participation in the food-stamp program tends to follow patterns of poverty and the economic cycle, rising in bad times and declining when the economy improves, according to a 2005 analysis by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the program.

That's partly because unlike many other government assistance programs, it is not limited to people with children, the disabled, elderly, or the unemployed. Anyone with a low enough income and few resources is eligible to receive food stamps. Families must make less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level - or less than \$2,238 per month or \$26,250 annually for a family of four.

"Everything is so much more expensive [now]," said Jodi Malloy, a 34-year old mother of two living in North Toledo who applied for food assistance earlier this month. "They raised the minimum wage, but that's not enough to pay for a \$300 gas bill ... and if you have kids it's even worse."

Ms. Malloy had been enrolled in the food-stamp program eight years ago when she was pregnant with her daughter and then didn't use the program for a number of years. She applied for it again last month.

"I'm trying to get some help," she said. "With the money I have now, by the time I buy food and everything, I don't have enough money to buy anything else."

"People get a stigma when they use food stamps," she said. "But it's not because you're not trying or you want to live off the state. You just need a little bit of help. We're not all doctors or lawyers."

Stacy Dean, director of food assistance policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, points to the economic factors as a key indicator of food-stamp participation. "If you go on past experience, the economy, particularly in a state like Ohio, is the main driver," she said. While there's no doubt the economy contributes to increased participation, some social service agencies say there's more to it.

"You can say economy - that's an easy word," said Bill Kitson, chief executive officer of the United Way of Greater Toledo. "But the reality is that there is a working poor [population] in the community - people who have jobs and those jobs do not keep up with the cost of living."

A person living in Toledo and supporting one child would have to make at least \$12.89 per hour to meet their basic expenses, according to the Living Wage Calculator, an online tool developed by a Penn State University professor that calculates living costs for various areas.

"The Real Bottom Line," a study on poverty in Ohio released last week, found the majority of the state's families in poverty are employed, many in low-wage jobs. In 2007, 1.1 million Ohioans over the age of 18 - about a quarter of the state's labor force - received their paychecks from jobs with wages of just under \$10 an hour, according to the study.

Antoinette Robinson, 32, who works as a clerk at Rite-Aid in South Toledo, makes \$7 an hour. She said the \$503 she receives every month in food stamps constitutes the majority of the monthly food budget for her and her four children.

"There are a lot of people who judge you just because you get them," she said.

Kim Parsons, a divorced mother of two who lives in Maumee, is a nursing student. She is working hard to graduate in December and is hoping once she gets a job as a nurse, things will get easier financially for her. In the meantime, she'll be using about \$244 in food stamps every month to help ends meet.

"Sometimes you just need some help," she said.

Contact Kate Giammarise at:

kgiammarise@theblade.com

or 419-724-6133



Muskegon Chronicle

Food trucks scheduled

Sunday, June 01, 2008

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

MUSKEGON COUNTY-- A series of Second Harvest Gleaners Trucks -- mobile pantries filled with food for the hungry -- will arrive in Muskegon County this month. For more information, call Community Access Line of the Lakeshore at 211 or 733-1155 or Muskegon Cooperating Churches at 727-6000.

The schedule is as follows:

- * Wednesday: 4 p.m., St. Michael's Catholic Church Native American Ministry, 1716 Sixth, 722-3071.
- * June 9: 4:30 p.m., Outpouring Worship Center, 11811 Heights-Ravenna, Ravenna, 853-2069.
- * June 12: 6 p.m., Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 1428 Terrace, 727-8207.
- * June 14: 1 p.m., Church of the Living God, 4249 S. Quarterline, 830-0900.
- * June 17: 10 a.m., Mission for Area People, 2500 Jefferson, Muskegon Heights, 733-9672.
- * June 20: 10 a.m., Fifth Reformed Church, 2330 Holton (M-120), 744-4781.
- * June 21: 9 a.m., First Congregational U.C.C., 1201 Jefferson, 726-3254.
- * June 25: 1 p.m., Christian Community Center, 540 E. Hackley, Muskegon Heights, 725-7579.
- * June 27: 10 a.m., C.A.S.T. Loaves & Fishes Pantry, 1095 Third, 722-9352.
- * June 28: 10 a.m., Calvin Church, 973 W. Norton, 737-5207.
- * June 30: 10 a.m., White Lake Congregational U.C.C., 1809 S. Mears, Whitehall, 893-3265.

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**NEWS > LOCAL NEWS****WIC coupons being converted to electronic card**[Print Page](#)**By Kate Hessling, Tribune Staff Writer**

Published: Thursday, May 29, 2008 11:20 AM EDT

HURON COUNTY — WIC coupons will soon be a thing of the past as officials are working around the state to implement a debit-card system that will be similar to the Michigan Bridge Card.

James McCurtis, Michigan Department of Community Health spokesperson, said effective Sept. 22, electronic cards will take place of the coupons issued in Huron County through the Women, Children and Infants (WIC) Program.

WIC is a food and nutrition program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH). Local agencies, such as health departments and non-profit organizations, deliver WIC services and benefits to the public.

Huron County Health Services Director Cindy Rochefort said there are about 1,000 WIC participants in Huron County.

Statewide, more than 200,000 moms, babies, and children less than age 5 receive nutritious foods from the Michigan WIC Program each month, according to the MDCH's website. WIC foods are worth \$30-\$112 or more per month for each participant.

The program is very active around the state, as MDCH estimates one out of every two babies born in Michigan receives WIC benefits.

WIC participants also receive help with nutrition education and breastfeeding, as well as referrals to other health services.

McCurtis said other states — including Texas, Wyoming and New Mexico — already have switched from issuing paper WIC coupons to the electronic debit cards.

He said MDCH started converting the whole WIC coupon distribution system back in March 2007.

"So we've been rolling these out county by county," McCurtis said. "(We) started in January of this year and we're going to finish in November."

The reason it's taken a while to get to Huron County, he said, is because the conversion began in the western part of the state.

It's not an overnight process as stores have to be converted to handle the electronic cards, McCurtis said.

"(Stores) don't have to buy any equipment, all the equipment is provided by EBT — Electronic Benefits Transfer — that's the system that we have," he said. "... Basically, all (stores) have to do is allow us to come in and change over the systems."

Stores have been aware of the conversion, McCurtis said.

"They've been involved and they know that it's coming," he said, noting stores are contacted two months before implementation, and they also have been made aware through announcements made through the Michigan Grocers Association. McCurtis said MDCH has received nothing but positive responses about the conversion from paper coupons to the electronic card.

"The reason for that is ... this system takes away the stigma of WIC coupons — like the stigma attached to food stamps," he said, referencing the conversion that already has taken place from issuing paper food stamps to issuing the electronic Michigan Bridge Card. "This (also) is like a credit card (like the Bridge Card). People use it, swipe it in the system, then get a balance of what's left on the card."

The other benefit to having an electronic WIC card is that it helps reduce fraud, McCurtis said. Also, WIC coupons currently are treated as if they are cash, meaning if they are lost or stolen, they can't be replaced.

"But if you lose your WIC card, you call it in as lost or stolen, then the card's disconnected and you get a new one ... (with) the same balance as you had before," McCurtis said.

Rocheftort agreed the WIC card will be helpful to WIC clients, as well as to those who administer the

coupons.

"I think it will be a benefit for anyone associated with WIC," she said.

Anyone interested in more information about the WIC Program, can call the Huron County Health Department at (989) 269-9721 ext. 111.

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A home for homeless vets

Groundbreaking set for \$20-million project

BY ZLATI MEYER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • JUNE 1, 2008

When Army Spc. Robert Frazier returned to metro Detroit after the Persian Gulf War in 1992, he was physically and emotionally injured.

A helicopter crash crushed two discs in the gunner's back and ruined one of his knees. Combat shattered his spirit. In the 19 years since Frazier enlisted, the former Sterling Heights resident has lost his marriage, his ability to hold down a job and his home.

But this time next year, Frazier, who currently lives in a shelter, could be living in a Detroit apartment designed specifically for homeless veterans.

Southwest Solutions is to break ground at 10 a.m. Monday on a 150-unit apartment complex and commercial building called Piquette Square.

Veterans who will live in the one-bedroom apartments just north of I-94 and east of Woodward will have access to counseling and job-skills training when the complex opens in spring 2009. It will be the second permanent veterans housing complex in the United States and the largest of its kind, said Bob O'Brien, spokesman for the nonprofit.

"You'd be able to get most of the things you'd need, and you would have buses going to the hospitals on a regular basis, so totally beneficial for someone like me," Frazier said Thursday.

More than 4,000 homeless veterans are in the Detroit area, and one out of three homeless men in Detroit and across the country is a veteran, according to Southwest Solutions.

The \$20-million project is to be financed by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, grants, bonds and tax credits, O'Brien said. The apartments will be available on a first-come, first-served basis to veterans of all conflicts. Rent will be on a sliding scale.

Other office tenants could include medical staff with Veteran Affairs, state veteran and labor departments and local businesses.

"Our hope is vets would be able to find employment in the area," O'Brien said.

But with the thousands currently deployed in Iraq, Frazier questioned why the government isn't developing more projects like Piquette Square.

"They're going to be coming back and needing help," said Frazier, a college dropout who two weeks ago moved to the Detroit Veterans Center, which offers temporary housing. "There's only so much help you can get from the government, and the rest you need to find on your own."

The Piquette Square idea originated 2 1/2 years ago in a series of meetings with Veteran Affairs, the MSHDA and Southwest Housing Solutions, O'Brien said.

"Our hope from this project is that it calls attention to what's possible for our vets when various government and private and not-for-profit entities work together," he said.

"The veterans administration can't do it all themselves. They needed partnerships with city and county and Southwest Solutions. I don't know why it's not something they've done before."

Contact **ZLATI MEYER** at 313-223-4439 or *meyer@freepress.com*.

Riders take to bikes to fight poverty

Monday, June 02, 2008

By Chad D. Lerch
clerch@muskegonchronicle.com

GRAND HAVEN -- A coast-to-coast bicycle tour scheduled to swing through Grand Haven this summer has raised more than \$1 million to help fight local and global poverty.

The "Sea to Sea 2008 Bike Tour" is a nine-week, 3,881-mile bicycle trip that starts June 30 in Seattle and finishes Aug. 30 in New Jersey.

Organizers are calling the event "the largest ever cross-continental cycling tour" -- a spinoff of a smaller 2005 event that toured Canada. After expenses, organizers hope \$1.5 million goes directly to worldwide outreach missions to fight poverty.

Spokesman David Raakman said 127 cyclists will ride the entire tour, each raising at least \$10,000. Ninety-two people have signed up for two-week stretches.

But right now, the focus is on fundraising.

"Some are finding it very easy to do, and some are having a bit more of a challenge with the fundraising," Raakman said. "They're going to members of their churches, families, friends and into their communities."

Cyclists have been recruited from the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America, which are spearheading the event, officials said.

Donations will pay for HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa, agricultural training and business development in low-income countries. The money also will help with emergency relief efforts, food banks and other missions in the United States and abroad.

"The tour is a vehicle -- no pun intended -- to point people to the real need: Raising awareness and money for those who are less fortunate," Raakman said.

Officials have been planning for the event since the fall of 2006. Registration is now closed, Raakman said.

While Raakman said no riders are from Muskegon or Ottawa counties, the tour is scheduled to arrive in Grand Haven on Aug. 15, or day 47 of the event. That day, the team will ride 47 miles from South Haven.

Riders will stay overnight at the Christian Reformed Church Conference Grounds, 12253 Lake Shore Drive and leave the next day for a 45-mile ride to Grand Rapids.

Louis Bosma, a minister from Aylmer, Ont., will ride the entire tour and has raised more than \$27,000. The tour also ventures into Canada for a short stretch.

"I have been overwhelmed by the financial support," he said in a prepared statement. "I saw this as an opportunity to, in some small way, try to personally make a difference in the lives of some of those so much less fortunate than myself."